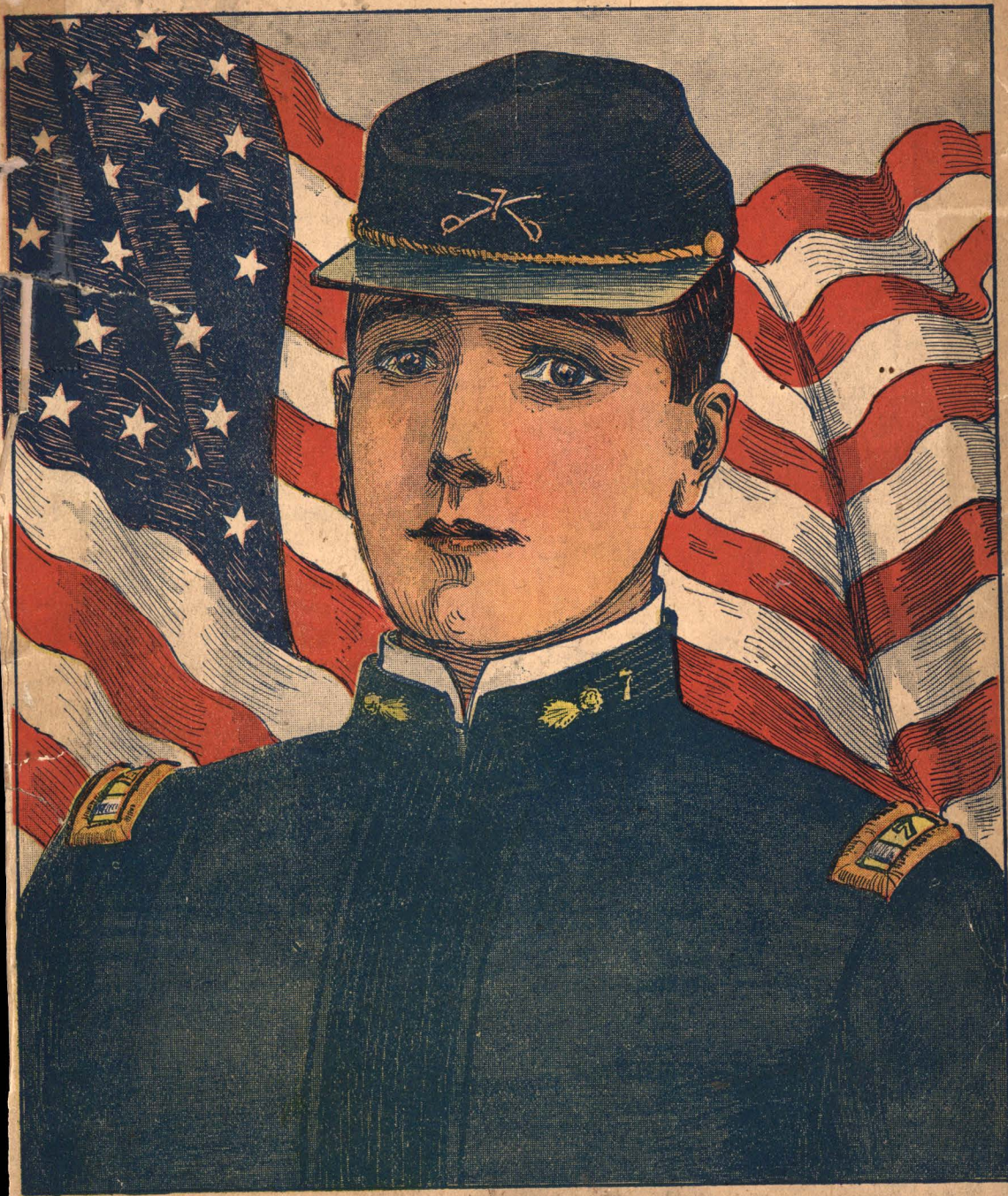


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STARRY FLAG WEEKLY

THRILLING STORIES OF OUR VICTORIOUS ARMY



UNDER BLANCO'S EYE OR HAL MAYNARD AMONG THE CUBAN INSURGENTS

J. FLINDT,

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Under Blanco's Eye;

OR,

HAL MAYNARD AMONG THE CUBAN INSURGENTS

By DOUGLAS WELLS.

First Part.

CHAPTER I.

"THE ONLY AMERICAN IN HAVANA."

"Stop!"

A boy of some eighteen or nineteen years rushed frantically out upon a wharf bordering the harbor of Havana.

"Hold on!"

Elbowing his way through the dark-skinned crowd, he reached the string-piece, now waving his arms wildly.

At the top of his voice came the fervent appeal:

"Don't leave me behind!"

Unheeded of the Spanish crowd about him, the boy gazed anxiously at the fast receding stern of the United States steamer Fern.

That crowd was bent on mischief. It had jeered itself nearly hoarse when the little steamer left her berth.

Now it saw in this shouting, gesticulating youth a closer victim of their sport.

"Swim!" jeered one low-browed, dirty Spaniard.

To this came an echoing shout of:

"Make him swim!"

"Yes! Throw the Yankee dog into the

harbor. He will find company in the sailors of the Maine!"

A yell went up—a yell that was partly derisive and partly defiant.

It had one effect that the victim was quick to notice—it utterly drowned out his appealing shouts to those on the deck of the Fern, causing him to gasp:

"Am I the only American left behind in Havana?"

It looked like it.

Further from the pier, nearer every moment to the entrance of Havana harbor went the Fern, the last of the United States steamers to leave Cuba's capital city on that memorable afternoon of the ninth of April, 1898.

Aboard the Fern was that sturdy American hero, General Fitzhugh Lee.

Up to the last moment he had served the interests of the United States and her citizens as consul general at Havana.

Now, when the state of affairs there had become intolerable, General Lee had sailed on the Fern.

After indomitable efforts extending over several days, he had succeeded in shipping, as he believed, the last American in that danger-infested city.

Then, and not until then, had General Lee stepped aboard the Fern.

His coming had been the signal for the start. A moment later the little steamer's prow was cutting the muddy, blood-stained waters of Havana harbor.

Close to the wreck of the United States' once proud battleship Maine passed the Fern.

Standing on deck, General Lee and his immediate party had bared their heads in silent respect and grief for the two hundred and sixty-six sailors whom Spanish treachery had destroyed.

General Lee believed that he had succeeded in bringing the last American away.

He certainly had, so far as he knew. He had done his duty like an American.

Yet, all unknown to him, one American remained behind—Hal Maynard, the boy who now stood watching the receding Fern with a look of mingled anxiety and wistfulness.

Suddenly Hal uncovered. His glance had rested on the Stars and Stripes at the steamer's stern.

It was a courageous thing to do—to salute the hated Yankee flag in this stronghold of that flag's bitterest enemies.

But Hal did it, without bluster or hesitation.

There was a choking sensation in the boy's throat; tears glistened in his eyes.

"My country's flag," he murmured brokenly. "May God always bless your folds, and protect them! May those Stars and Stripes soon come back here, and float a supreme warning that treachery and tyranny can never flourish in the New World!"

It may be that some of the Spaniards grouped about him heard him. If so, they did not understand, or it would have been worse for this American boy.

"The senor does not like our climate!" Jeeringly the words were uttered.

Half turning, Maynard gazed unto the speaker's eyes.

The latter was a Spaniard, a peon or

laborer. Ragged, barefooted, dirty, he had the appearance of a man half-starved.

The fellow's tattered sombrero rested at an angle on his head. His gleaming, glittering eyes, made brighter by that nondescript illness, slow starvation, had an ugly light in them.

In whatever direction Maynard turned he saw others like this fellow—thousands of them.

Every wharf and pier, every building near the water front, every available spot of view was crowded by Spaniards who had come out to watch the departure of America's consul general, and, watching, to jeer.

It was no use to gaze longer after the Fern, yet Hal Maynard found himself unable to stir.

"If I never see the flag again, I must see it to the last to-day," he murmured.

"Senor does not like our climate?" again jeered the fellow at his elbow.

Hal made no answer, not even turning this time.

But his tormentor would not quit.

"Perhaps it is our people that the senor does not like? I have heard that there were some Americans who do not love the Spanish!"

Still Hal stood with his eyes fastened on the flag.

"If the senor is a good friend of Spain," continued the fellow, with mocking insinuation, "he will shout, 'viva Espana!'"

Long live Spain? Hal Maynard would have died a dozen deaths sooner than utter such a detestable wish!

Those black, gleaming eyes were fastened on him pitilessly, until—until the tormentor found himself ignored.

Then he swiftly turned to his fellow Spaniards.

"Here is an American!" he cried.

A laughing chorus greeted the announcement.

"He wanted to go home!"

More laughter greeted this stupid sally.

"And now," continued the announcer, "he is crying to find himself left here with us!"

"There is yet time for him to swim after the vessel!" jibed another Spaniard.

"Or let him cruise home on the Maine!"

At this there was a cyclonic burst of laughter.

Instantly the other Spaniards began to cast about for sayings which the crowd would regard as being witty.

Hal Maynard's eyes flashed.

A fight would be helpless—hopeless, leaving him only the fate of death at the hands of this jibing, vicious mob.

Yet no sooner was the word "Maine" uttered than he turned once more to where the wreck of the Maine lay and lifted his hat with a motion of reverence.

It was grit—clear grit! That much even the Spaniards could appreciate.

It was a defiance, too, and in a moment angry murmurings went up.

"Let us see if a Yankee pig can swim!"

"And if he steers toward that battered iron scow, we can shoot him from the wharf."

"As we will shoot all Yankees who dare to come here after this!" shouted another.

Hal faced them, head erect and shoulders thrown back.

He fully expected to be thrown into the muddy water, but he did not propose to flinch.

For a moment the crowd hesitated, ready to follow any caprice, but waiting for a leader.

After waiting a moment for the attack, Hal felt a sudden thrill of misgiving.

His hand had touched, accidentally, on something under his coat.

That recalled him to his duty, to the reason for his being in Havana, to the cause of his being left behind.

Hidden away in his clothing was a

bag. It contained two thousand dollars, the property of another, confided to his care.

"This mob is made up of worthless fellows," muttered the boy. "They don't know any better than to do as they are doing. They are so ignorant that not one in a dozen of them would know his own name in print. They shall not make me forget my duty. Since there is no American ship here, I will try to find an English one."

Then, ignoring the crowd that surged about him, he turned again to scan the line of wharves.

Less than a quarter of a mile away lay a brig from whose masthead floated the Union Jack of Great Britain.

"I shall be safe there," murmured Hal. "I can leave Havana on that craft. It may even be that the brig is bound for an American port."

His mind made up, he turned to leave the wharf, meaning to walk along the river front until he came to the brig's wharf.

But his original tormentor put himself fairly in the boy's path.

"Where is the Yankee pig going to root?" he demanded.

Other murmurs went up.

"Do not let him leave us!"

"Not until he has cried 'viva Espana!'"

"Gentlemen," said Hal, trying to speak calmly, "I find that I am not on the right wharf. Will you allow me to pass?"

"Certainly, senor!"

"Way for the gentleman!"

"Let the Yankee pig find his wallow!"

Click-clack! click-clack! Way on the outskirts of the crowd a man had picked up a cobblestone, on which he now began to whet his knife.

It was a most suggestive sound. The crowd roared with merriment, craning

their necks to see whether this Yankee blanched.

But Hal, though he knew that a spark would be sufficient to touch off a mine of Spanish mob-treachery, retained his composure.

"I am in a hurry, if you please," he said, trying to edge his way through.

The crowd pretended to make way, yet each Spaniard took pains to get only more in the way.

They were playing with him, as a cat does with a mouse, enjoying their sport with true feline ferocity.

One of the crowd suddenly divined our hero's purpose.

"He wants to reach that English ship. The gringo fancies he will be safer there than with us. Let us convince him that our hospitality is genuine."

Still laughing, the crowd made way for Hal to pass off the pier, but the instant that he tried to walk along the shore in the direction of the bridge, he found himself confronted by the dense ranks of a barring crowd.

"No, no, senor! Straight back into Havana."

"I guess I might as well go to a hotel," Hal acquiesced, inwardly. "From there, an hour later, I may be able to get a closed carriage to the brig."

There was a driver within call. To him Hal signalled.

The jehu came up, but on hearing the name of the hotel, he shook his head and scowled.

"No, no, senor," he protested, "I cannot drive Yankees."

"I will walk, then," rejoined Hal.

But the crowd protested that he must ride.

"If the senor will pay three fares," declared the jehu, "I will take him."

"Very well," muttered Hal, stepping into the carriage.

"Ha! Senor Maynard, wait! I must

see you!" cried a man, making his way through the crowd.

"Vasquez!" thrilled the boy, recognizing his accoster.

Then, for the first time that day, Hal Maynard turned pale.

CHAPTER II.

JUAN RAMIREZ INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

Senor Vasquez, a middle-aged Spaniard with the air of a prosperous merchant, pushed his way through to the carriage.

The crowd, scenting as if by instinct some new trouble for the boy, made way for the newcomer.

Vasquez's eyes glittered. He regarded the boy with a look of evil triumph, though his manner, as he stepped into the carriage, was faultlessly diplomatic.

"You will excuse my intrusion?" he begged.

"I shall have to," was Hal's cold rejoinder.

"I was anxious to see you. This meeting has given me great pleasure."

Then, lowering his voice, he added:

"Senor Maynard, your employer owes me, as you know, two thousand dollars. I must have that money at once."

"If Mr. Richardson owes you anything," replied Hal, "he will pay it."

"Bah! Do you think I am so simple? Senor Richardson left yesterday for Key West."

"I repeat," came firmly from Hal, "that, if he owes you anything he will pay it."

"And I, my dear young friend," rejoined the Spaniard, "assure you that I mean to collect from you. You have the money. I know it."

Hal tried not to start at this cool piece of assurance.

"I know," continued Senor Vasquez, in the same low tone, "where you collected the money. I know just how much you collected, and can tell you, to a

peseta, just how much you carry in a certain bag. Ha! my friend, you do not seem happy over my knowledge. But a trustworthy man of mine has followed you. You see that there is no use denying what my faithful agent told me."

"But did he tell you," smiled Hal, coolly, "where I took that bag?"

Senor Vasquez changed color and hesitated.

That was enough to show observant Hal that his "bluff" had a chance of winning.

"If he did not tell you that," resumed the American, "go back and cane your agent for a sleepy fellow. Senor Vasquez, if you meant to wrest the money from me by force, you should have employed a better agent."

Maynard's manner was so cool and convincing that for a moment the Spaniard was staggered.

"Ha!" he cried, suddenly. "Whatever you have done with the money, you have not had chance to send it out of Cuba, and your last chance to do that is gone. Perhaps you will conclude to tell me where the money is."

"Assuredly not," rejoined Hal, stoutly.

"Now, if I were to make a few remarks about you to the crowd which surges about this carriage, do you know what would happen to you?"

"Certainly," replied Hal. "I should be in danger of being killed."

"Do you feel like taking the risk?"

"If you were scoundrel enough, senor, I should be compelled to take it."

Vasquez's black eyes snapped dangerously.

"I have only to say the word," he suggested.

Hal was playing a desperate game. The thought drove some of the color from his cheeks.

"Will you tell me where the money is?" insisted the Spaniard.

"Suppose that I did not know, how could I tell you?"

Vasquez snorted impatiently, then beckoned to one of the leaders of the mob, who quickly approached.

"Your last chance, Senor Maynard," whispered the Spaniard.

"I can tell you nothing."

As Hal uttered these words he expected to be handed over to the Spanish mob.

To his surprise Vasquez's manner swiftly changed.

To the ring-leader Senor Vasquez said:

"Pedro, I trust that your friends will not molest this young man. He is in a measure under my protection."

"Senor Vasquez's words always carry weight," was the quick, respectful answer.

"My dear young friend," went on the Spaniard, "I may see you again. If we do meet, I trust I shall find you more gracious."

With that the Spaniard slipped quickly from the carriage, and the driver, taking the cue, turned up one of the streets into the city.

Jeers followed, but nothing else happened.

"Vasquez is as slick as ever," mused Hal, sinking back on the cushion. "At first, he thought he would frighten me. Now perhaps he means to call upon me at the hotel, try to convince me that he saved my life, and thus work upon my gratitude. If Senor Vasquez imagines that he can persuade me to betray my good old employer, he will wake up and find it all a dream!

"But first of all he will send his agents out again, to see if he can get them on the track of the place where the money is. How my Spanish pirate would swear if he knew that he had been within a foot of the money all the while! Yet, because I have fooled the fellow this time, I must not underrate him. He is deadly!"

Deadly, indeed! Vasquez, though a

rich merchant, had seldom earned an honest dollar.

He belonged to a Spanish type that has been common in Cuba. American merchants and planters, especially those who were new to the island, had been his especial game for years.

He sought the acquaintance of such "new" Americans, tendered them his services and goods, and charged exorbitantly for both.

Should an American planter protest, the crop in one of his sugar or tobacco fields was burned, nor was it long before the planter learned that "irrepressible friends of Senor Vasquez had rebuked a grasping foreigner."

Should an American merchant protest at Vasquez's charges, something happened to the "impudent merchant's" stores or warehouses.

Yet Vasquez himself had always kept on the safe side of the law, while cheerfully ruining Americans.

They were simply compelled to submit to his extortions. One American, a planter, who had resolutely resisted the Spaniard, had been found dead, but the crime could be fastened on no one.

Just before the outbreak of the Cuban rebellion, Henry Richardson had started sugar plantations in the interior. He had fallen into Vasquez's hands at the outset, and had been systematically plundered.

Hal Maynard, who had come to Cuba a year before as Mr. Richardson's private secretary, had detected the Spaniard in several doubtful dealings.

Naturally Vasquez's feeling for our hero was far from cordial.

While Hal and his employer were still in the interior, Vasquez had tried to involve them in trouble with the Spanish authorities.

This menace Mr. Richardson had dodged by paying a liberal bribe to the officer commanding the nearest garrison.

Nevertheless, more dangers threatened these two Americans.

Then Consul General Lee's call had come for Americans to leave Cuba. Mr. Richardson had gone the day before. Hal had lingered long enough to collect two thousand dollars due his employer. This accomplished, he had traveled hastily to Havana, meaning to leave there on the historic ninth of April. We have seen how he had reached there too late.

The money that Vasquez claimed as his due was the balance of an exorbitant bill. He had already been paid far more than he was entitled to.

But he had hoped to overtake and intimidate the American boy.

The carriage drew up before the hotel door, which appeared deserted as, indeed, it was, for with money and food both scarce in Havana, the hotels stand but a poor show of patronage.

"Your three fares, peon," said Hal, dropping a few coins in the driver's hand.

"Four pesetas more," insisted the driver.

Hal paid it, without protest, and disappeared inside. He was quickly shown to a room, and requested that his trunk be sent up.

"Although I ordered that sent here from the interior," he smiled, as he bent over the box, "I expected to leave it behind."

Unlocking the lid, he examined the articles in the trunk for some moments, until a warning "Ss-sst!" reached his ear.

Rising quickly, Hal saw from whence the signal had come.

In the aperture made by an open skylight overhead appeared the head of a dark-skinned young man.

His bright, restless eyes took in everything in the room, our hero included.

"You are an American?" he asked, as Hal stepped under the skylight.

"Yes."

"Then I am your friend. But have you an enemy?"

"I—I fear I have."

"Look out of the window toward the harbor. Then come back."

Hal quickly obeyed, returning with a perturbed face.

"You saw Senor Vasquez approaching, with two officers and a squad of soldiers?"

"Just that!" affirmed Hal.

"The officers have a pretense, but Vasquez will really seek your money. If you have it not with you, or know a safe hiding place, you will fool him, but if the money is in your possession, it will surely be taken from you."

Hal hesitated, regarding the speaker with a look full of penetration.

What he saw was the frank, pleasing face of a youth of eighteen. Somehow, Hal's heart went out to the stranger.

"If," said the other, "you have the money, and wish to save it, you can trust it with me, senor."

"What could you do with it?" projected Hal.

"Drop it into one of my pockets," added the other, adding with a laugh:

"No one would search such a thin, ragged Cuban as I for the possession of so much money. But think quickly, senor, for Vasquez will be here in another moment. Juan Ramirez is my name."

"A Cuban?" asked Hal.

"See!" And Juan drew from a pocket what could easily become his death-warrant—a small Cuban flag.

This he kissed with a simple, unaffected air of devotion.

"By Jove, I'll trust you," murmured Hal. "I've yet to meet a Cuban thief!"

R-rip! In a second he began to unbutton his clothing, bringing out to view from under his shirt a long, thin bag.

"This contains two thousand dollars," he whispered.

"And if anything happens to you, to whom does the money belong?"

"Henry Richardson, at Key West."

"He shall have it," promised the Cuban. "Hush! There are steps on the stairs."

Like a flash, Ramirez vanished.

"Have I been duped?" wondered Hal, with a quick thrill of apprehension.

Ramirez had looked like a fellow to be trusted. Yet, if Hal had kept the money about him, it would soon pass into the hands of Vasquez, who would be able to persuade the Spanish judges that his claim was just.

"If Ramirez has stolen it," quivered Hal, "all I can say is that I'd sooner see him get it than Vasquez."

Tramp! tramp! tramp! Reaching the head of the stairs, the soldiers were now marching straight for his door.

Whack! thump! The door was thrown unceremoniously open, and the uniforms of Spain filled the room.

CHAPTER III.

"SPANISH EVIDENCE."

"This is the young man?"

One of the two officers who appeared at the head of a file of a dozen soldiers turned and put the question to Senor Vasquez.

That consummate liar responded by a nod of the head.

Though Hal Maynard had not studied his attitude, he stood at that moment a typical young American.

With feet rather spread, his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, shoulders manfully back and head inclining slightly forward, he ignored Vasquez, but regarded the officers with a rather indolent look in which there was just a trace of curiosity.

"A visitation, I presume?" he said, addressing one of the officers in Spanish.

But the latter, barely looking at him, turned to the other officer to command:

"Search the trunk."

"It is locked," said Hal, stepping slowly forward. "Permit me to offer you the key."

The officer who received it merely grunted, and immediately knelt before the trunk.

Hal stood by looking on, until one of the soldiers, after scowling at him an instant, darted forward and gave the boy a push.

"If I am in your way," retorted Maynard, recovering his equilibrium, "won't you be kind enough to say so?"

"Silence!" ordered the commanding officer.

Hal responded by a polite nod.

"These officers don't belong to the mob, and they should be gentlemen," he murmured. "If they're not, it's not for me to set them the example."

Flop! went a lot of Hal's clothing, strewn promiscuously over the floor.

Slap! followed his linen.

Smash! went a small hand mirror, flung across the room so that it struck the wall and landed on the floor in atoms.

"May I ask a question, sir?" queried Hal, turning to the officer in charge.

"Silence!"

"I beg your pardon," went on Hal, imperturbably. "All I wanted to ask was whether my property is to be ruthlessly destroyed before a charge has been even made against me?"

"Silence!"

"If I had committed any breach of decorum in asking," pursued Hal, calmly, "please consider that I didn't ask."

"Silence!"

Thump! The butt of a soldier's musket landed forcibly in Hal's stomach.

"Ouch!" grunted the boy.

"Silence!"

"Not even allowed to express natural emotion," murmured our hero. He

couldn't have talked much in his breathless condition, just then, even if he wanted to.

He saw the soldier's musket-butt aimed at him, and dodged as nimbly as he could.

Click!

Another soldier cocked his weapon, aiming fully at the American's head.

At this the commanding officer smiled. Some of the soldiers laughed softly. They wanted to see the Yankee flinch, and were sure that he would—for had not their Havana newspapers told them that all the Yankees were cowards?

But Hal, who felt reasonably sure that nothing short of violence on his part would result in his death just then, did not feel inwardly alarmed.

Instead, he slowly folded his arms, closed one eye, and with the other squinted down the steel barrel that stared him in the face.

"Bah!" muttered he who had aimed, now raising the muzzle of his piece. "The Yankee pig doesn't even know what a gun is."

"Silence!" came sharply from the commanding officer.

"Well," murmured Hal, under his voice, "I am gratified to learn that somebody else besides myself has to hold his tongue. I wouldn't like to do all the shutting-up!"

It was all a picnic, so he fancied, since he was not only sure that the officers would find nothing compromising, but also sure that, whoever got the money, Senor Vasquez would not.

But the Spaniard, who had been narrowly watching the boy, now interposed:

"Captain, may a civilian subject suggest that the accused has not yet been searched?"

"Senor," replied the captain, bowing slightly, "your loyal suggestion shall be at once acted upon. I myself will make the search."

Thereupon the captain waived the soldiers away, most of them withdrawing to the corridor and doorway.

"Stand beside the accused," ordered the captain, nodding at two of his men, who accordingly ranged themselves on either side of the American.

"Senor," said the captain, coldly, "you will understand that what I am about to do is a duty imposed upon me."

There was a trace of civility about this, which caused Hal to reply politely:

"If it is your duty, captain, I would be the last one to urge you from it. But I can tell you what I have about me. I have a pocket knife and a sum of money."

"Money?" uttered Vasquez, becoming alert at once. "It is mine—mine by right!"

"You are mistaken," replied Hal, coldly; "but if you need it you may have it. I have only three pesetas."

"Three pesetas?" faltered the Spanish merchant. He looked as angry as a man who is being robbed, for three pesetas is but about sixty cents.

"You may have it," rejoined Hal, with mock generosity, "if the officer permits me to present it to you."

Then he threw his hands up while the captain went through his pockets.

That officer looked a trifle ashamed of his task, for an army officer is a gentleman, at least by education.

But Hal's pockets, under the most rigid search, showed no more than he had mentioned.

"Off with your clothes, senor," came the next command.

Hal looked and felt a trifle surprised, but saw that the order was a serious one.

"Shall I er—er—withdraw to the closet before disrobing?" he suggested.

"Naturally not," was the dry answer.

There was no help for it. Hal had to obey, which he did with the poorest grace in the world.

But he passed through this ordeal like

the others without mishap, and was curtly informed that he could put on his clothing again.

This Hal did, next standing at ease between the two soldiers.

"Do you find anything?" asked the captain, turning to his subordinate.

"Nothing," replied the lieutenant.

"A mare's nest, eh?" smiled the captain, grimly.

Hal duplicated the smile, but in a more genial manner, then turned to look at Vasquez.

But that Spaniard suddenly darted over to the trunk, knelt beside the lieutenant, and began to help rummage among the few remaining articles there.

"Ha! Here is something," announced Vasquez, holding up a slip of paper.

Hal looked on, wide-eyed, for he knew well that no such paper had been among his possessions when he packed them.

Then he gave a gasp, for he realized the Spaniard's game at last. That scoundrel, by some clever legerdemain, had slipped a paper among Maynard's effects.

"Ho!" grunted the Spaniard, running his eyes over the page. "This is a note, apparently, from one of the comrades of that bandit chief, Gomez."

He finished reading, while the captain stood looking calmly on.

"An American plotter!" screamed Vasquez. "This is proof conclusive enough to merit for him a dozen deaths if that were possible!"

He held the page in one hand, pointing a denouncing finger at our startled hero.

"Let me see it," commanded the captain. "A letter relating to a filibustering expedition, eh? This is, indeed, evidence. So!" turning to Maynard. "You are one of the Yankees who help his majesty's subjects to rebel."

"Upon my honor," protested Hal, "I know nothing about that letter."

"Your honor?" cried the captain.

"Bah, you Yankee pig! Lieutenant, bring him along under guard. To the Prefatura."

To the Prefatura! To Havana's police headquarters? Over the door of that grim building might well be written, "All hope abandon, ye who enter here!"

It was at the door of this building that all trace had been lost of countless Cuban insurgents, the members of their families, and of others who had in any way been suspected of sympathy with the cause of the rebels.

From here, in the late hours of night, countless doomed ones had been led away, ostensibly to imprisonment in Morro Castle or Cabanas Fortress—with this horrible peculiarity, that they had never reached their destinations or been heard from again!

To the Prefatura! For an instant, contemplating the letter which the captain now held in his hand, Hal felt his heart sinking utterly.

"I was sure I could not be mistaken," murmured Senor Vasquez, softly.

That voice aroused the American as the bite of a snake would have done.

"Senor Vasquez," he cried, throwing his head back proudly, "we have not seen the end of this matter!"

Then, bowing to the captain, Hal stepped between the two files of soldiers as they formed.

Down the stairs they started. Vasquez brought up the rear, gnashing his teeth.

He had found no trace of the money.

But perhaps he yet hoped to!

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE PREFATURA.

Hal marched through the main entrance to the Prefatura.

His bearing was as proud as ever.

He could not have shown more fortitude had he felt that the whole honor of

Old Glory was resting on his youthful shoulders.

He had marched for more than two miles through the streets, his military escort taking a roundabout course, as if they enjoyed displaying this dangerous captive to the excited populace.

He had been jeered at, jibed at, made the butt of hundreds of coarse jokes.

At last he had reached the Prefatura. Senor Vasquez still brought up the rear. He carried himself with the air of one who wishes it understood that he has done his duty by his country.

In the corridor of the Prefatura Hal's escort halted until it could be learned before which official the prisoner was to be taken.

In the same corridor were other prisoners, each under guard.

There was only this difference: Hal Maynard was erect, rosy, healthy-looking. The other poor wretches, most of whom were women, were plainly Cubans.

Their invariably starved appearance showed them to be reconcentrados—people from the interior who had been driven in by General Weyler's infamous order, and then left to starve.

There was little, if any, acute terror in their faces. They had suffered so much, had witnessed so many atrocities, that they were indifferent to what was yet to come.

Paris, during the Reign of Terror, was not such a city of horrors as Havana has lately been!

Captain Tamiva, Hal's chief captor, still bearing the letter "found" in the boy's trunk, disappeared into one of the numerous offices opening upon the corridor.

He soon came back, ordering the soldiers to take their prisoner in.

Hal found himself arraigned before a stern-looking, elderly Spaniard. Before the latter, on his desk, lay the accusing letter.

He looked up quickly, this official, shot a penetrating look into the boy's face, and snarled out:

"So you are another of the Yankee pigs who root with our Cuban sucklings!"

"I am an American citizen, certainly," replied Hal.

"And a sympathizer, as I said."

"I have never held communication with the insurgents."

"But this letter?"

"I know nothing about it."

"It was found in your trunk."

"Though never placed there by me."

"Bah! Of what avail is lying? Do you think you are talking to some of your own stupid Yankees? Confess!"

"How can I," retorted Hal, "when there is nothing to confess?"

The official scowled, snorting impatiently:

"Time is valuable. We have too many cases like yours to attend to. The island is full of treason. Instantly tell me all you know about this letter, and the plans at which it hints, or take the consequences."

"There is nothing that I can tell you," rejoined Hal, earnestly.

"Then take the consequences!"

"I shall have to, since I can't run away from them."

"Very well. Then this is the disposition of your case: At ten to-night you shall be rowed across the harbor to Morro Castle. Once in a dungeon there you will be out of my jurisdiction, and thenceforth under the eye of General Blanco."

All the while Senor Vasquez had stood by looking silently on with his eager, burning eyes.

"One moment," he now interposed.

"May I have a word with the prisoner?"

"To one of such known loyalty as Senor Vasquez," replied the police official, politely, "no favor can be refused."

Vasquez led our hero to the other end of the room.

"You are to go to Morro Castle," whispered the Spaniard, warningly. "Do you know what that means?"

"Yes," retorted Hal. "Solitary confinement until——"

"Until——" followed Vasquez, eagerly.

"Until American sailors and soldiers purify that loathsome place by planting the American flag over it."

"Fool!" hissed Vasquez. "Do you imagine you will ever reach Morro?"

"I know only what that official said."

"Well, then, let me tell you," snarled the Spaniard, "that you will only embark in a boat that will start across the harbor. By and by that boat will return without you, but you will never have reached Morro! You will never be heard from again!"

"And it is for this you have plotted?" cried Hal, paling, but otherwise keeping his composure.

"If I have plotted," murmured Vasquez, rapidly, "it was for my own good. You would not expect me to serve another than myself, would you?"

"No!" came the answer, with withering sarcasm.

"Now, my young friend," went on the plotter, dropping into a cooing voice, "if I am a dangerous enemy, let us forget that. I am also a good friend. Your employer owed me the money which you collected. Put me in the way of finding that, and I have influence enough here to secure your freedom."

"Now, listen to me," retorted Hal, spiritedly. "Whether my employer owes you the money or not is nothing for me to decide. But I will tell you this honestly: I don't know where the money is, at this moment. If I wanted to play into your hands, I simply couldn't."

"You are lying!" gnashed Vasquez, but a searching look into the boy's face soon convinced that shrewd judge of

human nature that Maynard spoke the truth.

"I am not going to waste more time on you," went on the Spaniard, passionately. "If you send for me before it is too late, I will come. As you value even a few more days of life, don't tempt fate by taking the trip across the harbor to-night!"

Murmuring these words in the boy's ears, the scoundrel turned to dart away.

As he did so, another man moved forward, saying quietly:

"I will speak with the prisoner now."

Hal did not know the speaker until Vasquez stammered:

"The British consul general!"

"Yes," replied the visitor, Mr. Gollan, "I was informed that a British subject named Maynard had been arrested. I hurried here only to learn that Maynard is an American citizen. Is that the case?"

"It is, sir," affirmed Hal.

"Still," smiled Mr. Gollan, "perhaps I can do something. At the request of my government, Consul General Lee turned over to me this afternoon the papers and duties of his office. Mr. Maynard, can you suggest any service that I can do you?"

"Now, I should say so!" vented overjoyed Hal. "I have been arrested on false charges and a trumped-up paper. Can you not demand to see that document?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Gollan. "Come with me."

Together they stepped before the official who had just condemned Hal to Morro Castle.

"Do you mind my looking at the letter on which this young man's arrest was ordered?" asked Mr. Gollan.

"Certainly not," answered the official, at the same time raising the paper from his desk and handing it over.

"Thank you."

As Gollan ran his eyes over the paper,

Hal stood looking on at the spectacle that meant the turning point for his life or death.

Suddenly our hero started, uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and snatched the paper from Mr. Gollan's hands.

"I beg your pardon, sir," came impetuously from the boy, "but do you see this other side of the sheet? It is one of Vasquez's own business letter heads! He has blundered by not looking at the other side of the sheet on which he wrote! It bears out my charge that he trumped up this letter, for, bear in mind, sir, it was he who pretended to find it in my trunk!"

"Car-r-r-ramba!" exploded Vasquez, first turning white, next purpling with wrath.

Back went the paper into the police official's hands.

Senor Vasquez tried to explain; the police official asked a half a dozen questions in a breath, while Captain Tamiva had much to say.

But over all the hubbub arose Consul Gollan's voice:

"As representative both of the interests of Great Britain and the United States, I ask for the instant release of this prisoner."

Too disconcerted to speak, the police official could only nod his consent.

Hal felt an arm thrust through his. In a maze he was led down the corridor and into the square.

Then a hearty voice said:

"My young friend, I am very glad to have served you. I would advise you to leave Cuba at once."

"I intend to," responded Hal. "I saw an English brig loading at one of the wharves. I think I will try to get passage on her."

"The Emeline Atwood—a good vessel," replied Mr. Gollan. "She is bound, too, for Norfolk."

Then, after much hand-shaking and

many protestations of thanks from Hal, he turned down one of the side streets to the water front.

The narrow thoroughfares appeared deserted. He walked quickly.

"Now, that was stupid of me," muttered the boy, after going a quarter of a mile. "Why didn't I think to ask who it was that took word to Mr. Gollan? Could it have been Ramirez?"

"Senor! senor!" whispered a voice through the shutters of a window. "Walk faster, and remember that you are being followed!"

Like a shot Hal halted, trying to catch sight of his informant.

"No, don't stop! Don't look this way, or you'll betray me," came the whisper. "But hurry! The deadliest danger hovers over you in the next five minutes!"

Second Part.

CHAPTER V.

"A SPANIARD OF HONOR!"

"Thanks!"

The acknowledgment, softly uttered as the warning, floated back over Hal Maynard's shoulder as he struck out on the double-quick for the water front.

Once he turned. Over his shoulder he saw three indistinct figures following him down the street.

Fast as he was traveling, the pursuers increased their speed until they seemed likely to overtake him.

"Is this more of Vasquez's deadly work?" groaned Hal. "Will he never stop until he has destroyed me?"

Cold perspiration oozed out on the boy's forehead.

He broke into a swift run.

At this gait, he calculated that less than three minutes would bring him to the English brig's wharf.

As he ran, he took a flying look over his shoulder.

Hardly more than two hundred feet to

the rear were the pursuers, their sandaled feet moving without noise.

"I can beat them," thrilled Hal, putting on an even better spurt of speed.

Just ahead was the water-front street.

Here, a swift turn to the right, and a speedy dash would carry him to the wharf he sought.

Trip! Hal's feet became entangled in something stretched across the sidewalk.

He plunged, then fell to the sidewalk, measuring his full length there.

More quickly than he could rise, a figure darted out of the doorway.

Across the boy's body a man hurled himself.

"You'll fight for it—sure!" vented Hal, gripping the stranger by the throat.

• They grappled, struggled, breath coming quick and short.

Hal fought like a tiger. He quickly placed himself on top of his assailant, but could not wrench himself loose.

Pit-patter-pat! Soft sandals struck the sidewalk as the three shadows rushed upon the scene.

Not pausing an instant, they hurled themselves into the melee.

Many hands grappled the boy at once. Maynard fought with renewed fury, but what could he do against so many?

One seized him by either arm and shoulder, another grasped his kicking feet.

"Help! help! help! Thieves!" roared the victim, but his captor-carriers did not even attempt to stifle his cries—the surest way of proving that they had no reason to fear interference.

Hal's first assailant now darted back into the doorway, unlocking a door, and making way for the squad to enter.

Still kicking and squirming, Hal Maynard was carried through the house and out into a courtyard at the rear.

Here he renewed his shouts, with no other effect than to make his captors smile maliciously.

At the rear of the yard a gate was unlocked.

Hal Maynard involuntarily crossed a second yard, after which those who carried him entered another house.

Here he was carried into one of the rooms, and unceremoniously dumped upon the floor.

"You stay there," muttered he who appeared to be the spokesman, "unless you are foolish enough to try to escape."

"What would be the use?" grated Hal, inwardly. "They wouldn't be so sure of me if there was a dog's chance to crawl out."

The spokesman went out, but the other three remained.

Ting-a-ling-ling! tinkled a bell in another room.

"A telephone," conjectured Hal. "Will Senor Enrique Vasquez be at the other end of the wire?"

Though he listened intently, he could not hear the words spoken into the receiver.

Presently the fourth man came back.

As Hal had not made any effort to get up, his jailers now squatted upon the floor, lighting paper cigarettes and puffing incessantly.

Minute after minute dragged by.

Hal did not address a word to his captors. Neither did he shout for help, for he felt sure that he would not have been left ungagged had they feared that his voice would reach friendly ears.

Nor did his captors speak, beyond an occasional word addressed to one another.

"Whatever is to be done, they are merely the agents of some one else," cogitated Hal, his mind as busy as his tongue was idle. Vasquez bragged about his agents. Are these some of them? If so, they not a lot to boast about!"

His reflections were cut short by the sound of the wheels of an arriving carriage.

Then steps sounded in a hallway, next at the door.

The door opened, to give entrance to Senor Vasquez, as Hal had expected.

As the Spaniard's burning gaze fell upon the boy, his face darkened, though his lips smiled.

"Good-evening, Senor Maynard," was his greeting. "Did you think that you had seen the last of me?"

"Hardly," grittled Hal. "I have always heard that the devil is more busy than successful."

"Take a seat, senor," urged Vasquez, pushing forward one of the few chairs in the room. "As to you, my good fellows," turning to the four thugs who had vanquished Hal, "you may step just outside the door."

As almost anything was more comfortable than the floor, Hal availed himself of the chair.

Next he turned a look of cool scrutiny upon the Spaniard.

Yet, if Hal looked cool, his appearance was far from expressing his feelings.

He fully realized that never before had he been in such a critical situation.

In fact, with such a foe as Vasquez, who, under the circumstances could not be placated, there was little hope that the American could escape with his life.

Senor Vasquez drew out a cigar, lighted it, and puffed slowly for some time before he began to speak.

Yet, while thinking, his brow grew blacker.

"Senor Maynard," he finally blurted out, "are you not ashamed to be an American?"

Hal turned eyes that were wide open with surprise upon the man pacing the floor before him.

"Ashamed of being an American?" he repeated. "Senor Vasquez, are you training for a humorist? How can any American live without finding life one

long thrill of pride that he is part and parcel of the Stars and Stripes?"

"Bah!" retorted Vasquez, impatiently. "Shall I tell you what your greatest fault is?"

"If you care to."

"You Americans are not honest," went on the Spaniard. "You lie, cheat and steal, always pouring the pesetas or dollars into your pockets, and laughing at the more simple more honest people of other nations from whom you derive your dishonest profits. Nowhere do you find easier victims than the old-fashioned, simple, trusting, generous, honest Spaniards."

"Of whom I suppose you are one?"

"Of whom," repeated Vasquez, sadly, "I am one."

Hal could not keep back the burst of laughter that sprang to his lips.

"Why do you laugh?" demanded Vasquez, angrily. "Because you have duped me so easily?"

"Because you have duped yourself so easily," retorted Hal, with spirit. "You vaunt your honesty, you who have never earned an honest dollar in your whole career. You, a simple, trusting man, when you cannot look back upon a single month in twenty years when you have not used the fear of fire or the assassin's knife to enforce the payment of exorbitant claims against Americans who were new to the island! When you look into your own heart, Vasquez, can you blame me for laughing at your pretenses?"

But Hal did not laugh now. His voice rang with a scorn and contempt that were too deep for merriment.

"Your employer owed me money," went on Vasquez, plaintively.

"He has paid you far more than he ever owed you. That I know from the dealings I have had between you. As near as I could place it, you have robbed him, in three years, of at least twenty thou-

sand dollars more than you were entitled to. Yet you prate about honesty!"

"He owes me two thousand dollars," insisted the Spaniard, doggedly. "Senor Richardson escaped from Cuba yesterday, and left me sighing in vain for my money. I find that you have collected, within the last twenty-four hours, money of his enough to pay me. Yet you refuse to turn it over to me."

"Of course I refused," voiced Hal. "I should have been false to my trust if I had paid over my employer's money without authority from him."

"And that is why I call you dishonest," cried Vasquez. "You have conspired, you two, to defraud me of my money."

"You didn't conspire to have me sent to Morro Castle, did you?" sneered Maynard.

"Now," resume the Spaniard, ignoring all the inconvenient points in Hal's reply, "I have stated fully my grievance against you. Do not think, you Yankee pig, that you can hope to dupe me any longer. You are now dealing with a Spaniard of honor!"

Vasquez drew himself erect and puffed his chest out as if he believed his vain-glorious boast.

Halting suddenly before the boy, he glared at Hal with burning eyes, and demanded, with a pause after each word:

"Where—is—that—money?"

"I don't know."

"Yet you had it."

"Certainly?"

"Then what did you do with it?"

"I shall never tell you," retorted Hal, with spirit.

Now Vasquez's passion escaped all bounds.

"Oh, you Yankees! Oh, you thieves!" he declared, violently, pacing the room like a caged hyena. "You hope to dupe us, even when you are in our power."

Then his voice became sarcastic, as he went on:

"Senor, do you know how we Spaniards love you Yankees? Do you realize what happiness it would give us to caress you? To caress each and every one of your people—to caress them so?"

Pausing in his agitated walk, Vasquez drew a knife, making a significant gesture of cutting a throat.

"That is the way we would like to treat all you Yankees," went on the Spaniard. "No! I mistake. That would be much too quick a punishment. We must be more ingenious in our punishment of the impudent Yankees—even as I propose to deal with you now."

Under that fierce, malicious gaze, Hal Maynard felt himself growing "creepy."

It did not afford him much satisfaction, even, to see Vasquez put away his knife, for the Spaniard's word and manner left little doubt that the knife would be put aside only in favor of a more fearful method of revenge.

"Senor, I ask you, for the last time, what did you do with the money?"

"And I refuse to tell you a word."

"Did you understand that I was asking for the last time?"

"Yes!"

Hal fairly hurled the short, defiant retort.

As Senor Vasquez realized that it was too late for parley, he raised his voice, shouting:

"Pedro! Jose!"

Instantly the door opened. Vasquez's four agents filed into the room.

"Bind the pig! Gag him!" directed the Spaniard, tremulously.

These orders were swiftly carried out, for, though Hal Maynard struggled manfully, he was like clay in the hands of so many desperate fellows. Weights were tied to his feet.

"He is ready," voiced Vasquez, glar-

ing at last at his helpless foe. "Pedro, open the shutters over there."

Then Hal was lifted and carried to the window.

Out he was thrust, face down, his startled eyes gazing down at the muddy water of Havana harbor but a few feet below him.

"Ready, my good fellows?" quivered Vasquez.

"Ready, senor!"

"Then drop him!"

Through the darkness of the night shot a human form.

Plash!

Hal Maynard's bound and weighted form sank below the foul waters.

He had gone to share, in a different way, the fate of the Maine heroes!

CHAPTER VI.

CUBA'S NEW RECRUIT.

Rub! rub! rub!

Chafe! chafe! chafe!

Under the shied over a wharf one human figure bent over another.

Rub! rub! rub!

With the quiet but energetic heroism of common humanity, the rescuer strove to bring back the spark of life to a young man only just snatched from the engulfing waters.

"It is odd, strange!" muttered the rubber, pausing for an instant to look at the lifeless figure. "Can it be possible that I was too late—or that I am too clumsy?"

He bent anxiously over the still figure.

"It would be a great thing to fool Senor Vasquez," murmured the Cuban, for such he was. "Moreover, I would like greatly to save this American, who trusted me even as I trusted him."

For some minutes more he continued to chafe the wrists and body of Hal Maynard.

"A sip or two of brandy might save him—but how shall one get brandy,

which costs twenty-five pesetas a bottle? Perhaps——"

But Juan Ramirez suddenly and resolutely checked the thought that perhaps he might be justified in using some of the money intrusted to him by our hero.

"He said that belonged to another. Therefore he would not thank me to use some of it to save his life."

Such was the simple creed of honor of this Cuban.

He was soon rewarded, however, by a flutter of the eyelids, a sigh from the unconscious one.

"Santa Maria! He still lives!" cried the Cuban, now overjoyed, and working as if his own life depended upon the result.

A minute later Hal Maynard opened his eyes.

Juan bent so low over him that, despite the darkness, our hero recognized his rescuer.

"Ramirez?" he murmured.

"At your service, Senor Americano."

"But I was dropped into the harbor—weighted."

"And I, senor, was fortunate enough to be near by."

Hal blinked stupidly, having by no means recovered his wits as yet.

"Rest easily, and breathe freely," counseled the Cuban. "Do not try to move yet. Do not even try to think."

Hal obeyed, lying there for two or three minutes before he tried again to speak.

"Where are we now?" he asked, finally.

"Senor, I would caution you not to speak above a whisper. We are both in danger, if some unfriendly prowler should overhear us. Let me raise you—so. Now, do you see the building over yonder that rests upon the water's edge?"

"Yes."

"It was from one of those windows that you were dropped."

"And you——"

"I was prowling near, senor. No sooner did the scoundrels hear the splash than they closed the window. It was then that I dove into the harbor, swam to you, and found you some ten feet below the surface. It was a simple matter to cut the ropes that bound the weights to you. Then I brought you here. That is all, senor."

"All?" echoed Hal, now sitting up. "It seems to me, my friend, that you make a very modest statement of your noble action."

"Senor, to-day you trusted me. In return I could not do less."

"And it was you, I am sure, who went to the British consulate——"

"I was there, senor."

"And it was you who lodged the information that resulted in my release at the Prefatura."

"It was I, senor, as you have guessed," Ramirez quietly replied.

"You have been my good angel to-day," cried Maynard, gratefully.

"I could not do less, senor, after a stranger had trusted me."

"And it was you who warned me to-night that I was being followed."

"Wrong this time, senor. It was a friend of mine."

"Yet he worked at your instigation?"

"True."

"And, finally, you have saved me from certain death."

"All of which, Senor Americano, gives me occasion to rejoice," answered the Cuban, simply.

Hal now managed to get upon his feet. No sooner did he find himself facing the Cuban than he warmly grasped the latter's hand.

"I owe you my life and the safety of my money," cried Maynard, impulsively. "Yet I never saw you before to-day. Pardon me if such great friendliness bewilders me."

"I have done only what any Cuban

would do for an American," was the quiet reply. "I offer you one more service before leaving you. You were bound to some ship?"

"The British brig, Emeline Atwood."

"I know her berth. I will lead you there. Once on board, you should be safe. Come; I will show you the way, *senor*."

"Wait just one instant," implored Hal. "Ramirez, such friendship as you have shown to-day is seldom met with. Pardon me if I seek to learn something about you."

"There is little to tell," responded the Cuban. "I love this people and their island, for I am one of them. I have done, as perhaps you have guessed, all in my power to serve Cuba. You see, *senor*, I do not hesitate to trust you. You will wonder why one of my sentiments is not in the Cuban army. I will answer that question before you ask it. It is forbidden to a Cuban to join our patriot army unless he can bring with him a gun and some ammunition. When I can do that, I shall leave Havana and take to the long grass where the insurgents, if not as thick as locusts, are fighting as bravely as lions. Beyond that I can tell you little, except that I have no living relatives. All have died of starvation, and my greatest dread is that I shall starve before I am ready to strike out for the long grass."

Simple and brief as Ramirez's statement was, it was the eloquent account of a patriot who would die for his cause and country, and who would die with equal cheerfulness, either of starvation in Havana, or under arms in the field.

There were tears in Hal's eyes as he heard the simple story.

But Ramirez cut short his reflections by saying:

"*Senor*, not all of our danger is behind us. If you are going to the English ship, let me advise you that we should start at once."

"Just one more question before we go," interposed Hal. "You spoke of a gun and ammunition. Can they be obtained here in Havana?"

"When one has the price, *senor*."

"And what is that price?"

"Well, if I had twenty-five dollars I could buy a rifle and a pocketful of cartridges. But, why speculate? Twenty-five dollars is not to be found."

"You are right," responded Hal. "Let us find the brig."

Ramirez guided him from the wharf and led him down a dark street, halting every few steps to make sure that they were not being followed.

Of a sudden, the Cuban, every instant alert, dragged our hero into a doorway.

"Here comes the patrol," whispered Juan.

Hal listened, yet it was some moments before he could hear the tramp of soldiers.

"Your hearing is wonderful," he whispered.

"It is said," replied Ramirez, "that starvation quickens all the senses."

"And you are starving?" uttered Hal, feeling as if he were choking.

"Far from it," was the answer. "I ate a quarter of a loaf of bread the day before yesterday."

"And since——"

"I have had several drinks of water, but it was warm and therefore not palatable."

Terrible as this statement was, it was made quietly, without the least trace of a desire to parade misery.

Tears glistened in Hal Maynard's eyes. He was about to speak when Ramirez cut him short by whispering:

"I find that this door behind us opens. That is fortunate, for otherwise we would perhaps be captured."

Silently both moved into the hallway. Trying not even to breathe, they listened

as a score of Spanish regulars or volunteers marched by.

Only a few yards further on they heard the command halt. Then followed a dialogue between an officer and a belated pedestrian.

It was soon evident that the latter could not give a satisfactory account of himself, for they heard the officer break in sharply:

"Enough! Step in between the files. You shall tell the rest of your story at the Prefatura."

Tramp, tramp! sounded the squad, marching on again. Ramirez listened until long after Hal had heard the last footfall.

Then the door was opened once more, and the pair stole out to the sidewalk.

"We are safe," breathed Ramirez. "Walk quickly for a minute, and you will be aboard your ship."

A prediction that was realized, for, without further mishap, they reached the wharf and walked its length.

"Who comes here?" growled a gruff voice.

Hal's heart gave a jump at sound of the old, dear, familiar English tongue.

"We are friends. I am an American," he replied, stepping in advance. "I wish to speak with the captain."

"You'll find him on board, sir," replied the sailor, more respectfully.

"I must leave you, senor," whispered Ramirez, adding, when he saw Hal's look of surprise: "The money that you intrusted to me I left with friends. Do not be uneasy. In twenty minutes you should see me back."

Before Hal could grasp his hand to wring it, Ramirez had glided off in the shadows.

"Of all the true hearts in the world," gasped Maynard, admiringly. "Will he come back? I wish I were as sure of heaven!"

Without a doubt regarding Ramirez,

our hero turned and went aboard the brig.

Only three words of introduction were needed to secure a warm grasp from Captain Blodgett's hand:

"I'm an American."

"And left behind, eh?" demanded the captain. "We sail at midnight; Norfolk; there's plenty of room aboard."

"May I speak confidentially with you, sir?" asked Hal.

"Of course."

They conversed in low tones by the rail for ten minutes. After that they turned, looking shoreward.

At length, Ramirez appeared. No sooner did he reach the wharf than he struck into a trot that did not slacken until the Cuban reached the Atwood's deck.

"Your money, senor," announced the breathless messenger.

Diving under his jacket, he produced a bag.

"To my belief it has not been opened. Nevertheless, senor, you will do me a great favor to count the money, and thus acquit me of all suspicion."

"At your request only I do so," answered Hal. "Captain, may we use the table in your cabin?"

"In more ways than one," was the hearty answer. "Follow me below, gentlemen."

There, upon the table the bag was opened, the money poured forth.

Not much time was required in the counting. Two thousand dollars was restored to the bag. The balance, sixty dollars, Hal stowed away in his own pockets.

"My own money," he announce. "Ramirez, how can I ever thank you for all your honesty and goodness?"

"Since your people have been our friends for three years," came the reply, "it is enough for me to know that I have

served an American. And now I must take my leave of this vessel."

"I also," replied Hal, rising.

"You?" echoed Ramirez, amazed, while Captain Blodgett looked gravely on.

"Certainly," rejoined Hal; "I am going with you."

"With me, senor? Where, may I ask?"

"To the long grass, if you will take me."

"You? Santa Maria! Do you mean, senor, that——"

He paused, utterly bewildered, but Hal Maynard finished, quickly:

"Ramirez, I saw a man when I met you. I am anxious to prove my own manhood. I offer myself as a recruit to fight Spain!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE TEMPTATION OF PEDRO.

Had a bombshell exploded near the Cuban, he could not have been more excited.

"You a recruit?" he gasped.

"Why not?" laughed Hal. "Am I not healthy enough, or do you fear that I would run at the first fire?"

"Senor, you would be a valuable recruit, but you are not a Cuban."

"Is that a disqualification?"

"But this rebellion is not your affair, senor. You belong to a free people, and have no need to fight for Cuba."

"There are already many Americans who take a different view. With Maximo Gomez and Calixta Garcia there are scores, if not hundreds, of American citizens. I have not heard that they make poor soldiers. Ramirez, I owe my life to you. You are a Cuban. Therefore, I owe my life to Cuba. I have no family ties; no obligation except to my employer. Captain Blodgett has undertaken to deliver the money to him. There is nothing to hold me back. You have remained

in Havana because you did not have the twenty-five dollars with which to buy a gun. I have enough to buy two. Will you take me to the insurgents, or will you go alone?"

Ramirez still hesitated for a moment; next he darted forward seizing Hal's hand.

"Senor, if you are in earnest, I will show you the way."

"It is settled, then," was all Hal Maynard said.

"Oh, this is glorious!" cried Ramirez, his eyes becoming misty. "At last I am to be able to join the Cuban army. More than that, I shall take a comrade with me."

"Here is all the money I have in the world," added Hal, turning his funds over to Juan. "Henceforth, it belongs to Cuba."

"Let us lose not a moment's time," urged Ramirez, his eyes dancing with delight. "Senor, I am afraid to move, for fear I shall wake up and find it all a dream. I cannot delay for a second."

"Nevertheless," broke in Captain Blodgett, "I hope you will dally here for a little while. Young men, you are starting into an island where starvation reigns. Let me offer you a square meal—the last, perhaps, that you will get for weeks to come."

"I do not need food," declared Juan, trying to puff out his thin cheeks. "Happiness will sustain me."

"I'm hungry, and not ashamed to say so," interposed Hal, with a laugh. "If Captain Blodgett will do something to relieve that, I beg you, my dear fellow, to wait here a few moments."

Juan reluctantly consented. A bustling steward soon had the table spread with hearty food.

Hal ate a hearty meal. Ramirez fed like one famished.

"Bah!" uttered the Cuban, rising in disgust at last. "I have made such a wolf

of myself that I am not fit to walk. But to you, captain, I offer a thousand thanks for your hospitality, and a thousand apologies for the spectacle I have made of myself."

"I shall hold together until to-morrow," murmured Hal, rising with a satisfied air. "Captain, my most earnest thanks."

Now the bustling steward came back with two parcels of food which he helped the young men to stow away under their jackets.

Captain Blodgett, hearty, if somewhat taciturn, followed them to the deck, slipping into Hal's hand a receipt for the money, which he undertook to forward to its destination.

"The best of good luck, lads," came in an earnest whisper from the English captain, as he offered each a hand at the same time.

They stepped ashore, Ramirez acting as guide.

Of all that followed, during the next two years, Hal had, at the end of that time, only the vague recollection that follows a dream.

But they reached the southern outskirts of Havana without mishap; they trudged along a dusty country road, dodging behind trees or into the brush whenever Ramirez's acute hearing warned them of the presence or approach of military.

"Do you see those lights ahead?" queried Juan, at last.

"Yes."

"Those lights come from the Inn of the Red Cavalier. It is the inn where Spanish officers dine when they return from the interior well provided with plunder taken from those who had yet something left to lose. Judging by the sounds, there are officers dining there now."

"A good place to keep away from, eh?" queried Hal.

"By no means, senor. Keep close to

me, and I hope to show you that such places as the inn are useful to the insurgents."

Ramirez left the road, plunging into the depths of a grove.

The nearer he came to the inn the more slowly he moved.

Frequent bursts of laughter were now audible from the inn.

"They are happy, the Spanish fiends," muttered Juan, grating his teeth. "Yet, senor, they are feeding on the very blood of Cuba!"

Rattle of dishes and clink of glasses came to the ears of the listeners. Outside the inn were tethered some two score of horses, while soldiers lolled about over the ground, some eating bread, while others puffed at cigarettes.

"Twenty of our own brave Cuban fellows could stop that gayety forever," growled Ramirez, savagely.

"But there are at least forty of the enemy," observed Hal.

"It is no matter. Twenty of our men would do. But hush! There is the gleam of a soldier's musket—a sentinel. Senor, do not make a sound that will betray us."

Forward, a foot at a time, moved the pair, while not even a blade of grass rustled under their feet.

So quietly did they move, in fact, that, aided by the darkness and shadow of the grove, they gained a spot within less than thirty feet of the pacing sentinel.

Halting, Ramirez looked long and anxiously at this uniformed son of Spain.

When the Cuban placed his mouth close against our hero's ear, it was to whisper:

"Senor, that soldier is one whom I know, for I have long had my eyes upon him. If all goes well, we shall soon have two guns. If I am deceived, our lives are not worth a peseta. If you hesitate, go back, and I will take the chance alone."

"Go back?" whispered Hal. "Not when you go forward!"

Ramirez's black eyes danced as he nodded.

Then, craning his neck forward, he whispered, sharply:

"Pedro! Pedro Escarillaz!"

In an instant, the sentinel halted, turning his head.

"If money will do you any good, Pedro Escarillaz, come here."

Quick as a flash, the soldier's rifle flew to his shoulder.

Then, reconsidering, he walked slowly toward the grove.

"Who called?" he asked.

"Men who have money," answered Juan. "If you happen to be hungry, you will be glad that we have called you."

Hal felt thunderstruck.

"Is this Cuban crazy?" he wondered, hardly knowing whether to run or stand his ground.

But the next second brought better counsel.

Up to the present, Juan had proven himself very far removed from a lunatic.

Nevertheless, Maynard felt cold shivers running up and down his spine as he realized that slight warning from this sentinel would bring the whole Spanish force down upon them.

"Who are you?" whispered the sentinel, stopping squarely in front of them.

He held the muzzle aimed at them, ready to fire at the slightest sign of need.

Yet that muzzle wavered slightly, as if the Spaniard's fingers, tightly gripping stock and lock, were twitching.

"The Spaniard is more afraid than I am," muttered Hal, inwardly. "I guess it's the wrong time for me to get rattled."

Though the talismanic word "money" had brought the soldier a little off his beat, it was plain that he feared some surprise, for he not only gazed keenly at

his two accosters, but tried to peer over their shoulders into the darkness beyond.

"You called me?" he demanded, in a voice that could not have been heard twenty feet off.

"Yes," answered Juan, coolly. "We need your services. We can pay for them. Could you use money if you had it?"

"Carramba!" muttered the fellow, his eyes gleaming. "Could I not?"

"Very well, Pedro Escarillaz; we do not want much—only two rifles and a hundred cartridges."

"Carr-r-r-rajo!" swore Pedro, under his breath. "It is death to talk that way."

"Then you cannot serve us?" demanded Juan, in a voice that sounded all but indifferent.

"How much do you offer?" asked the soldier, suddenly.

"Fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars for a gun and cartridges?" repeated Private Escarillaz. "It is too little."

"That would be altogether too much," retorted Ramirez, imperturbably. "The price that I have offered must be for two Mauser rifles and a hundred cartridges."

"Say seventy-five dollars," proposed the soldier, "and I may be able to help you. But for less it cannot be done."

"Then, Perdo Escarillaz, I wish you good-night," answered Juan, performing a half wheel.

"Not so quick," uttered the soldier, warningly. "Suppose I were to call the guard? You would lose your money and your lives."

"True," admitted Juan, composedly; "but then your officers would get the money, and you would get nothing. If you make a trade with us—why, just think what you could do with so much money."

"If I only knew how to accomplish it," murmured Pedro, his dark eyes snap-

ping at thought of the good times he could have in Havana with so much wealth.

"Oh, very well," said Juan, calmly, "if you cannot do it, we have made a serious mistake, and you have been a great loser."

"Wait," whispered Pedro. "In five minutes the guard will be changed."

"And then——"

"I will do my best."

Hal and Juan ensconced themselves behind some bushes. In ten minutes Pedro Escarillaz returned, trembling and pallid.

Almost in silence, the trade was made, the traitor not daring to look into the eyes of the purchasers.

Silently as shadows, the two latest recruits for Cuba stole off in the night.

But Juan Ramirez seemed to have grown a half a foot as he turned to his American comrade, murmuring hoarsely:

"Now, mi amigo, for the long grass! Henceforth our only cry shall be 'Viva Cuba Libre!' "

Third Part.

CHAPTER VIII.

"AS GOMEZ WOULD SPEAK."

"It is your turn, mi amigo!"

"Ready!" responded Hal, rubbing his eyes and then springing to his feet.

As he did so, he caught up the Mauser rifle which had lain at his side as he slept.

It was past sunrise. When he had lain down, the earth was still wrapped in darkness.

There had been a bargain that he should sleep an hour, then rise and stand guard while Juan snatched an hour of refreshing sleep.

Was it all a dream? Hal wondered, as he surveyed the scene with alert eyes while Juan had already commenced to snore.

A dream it certainly was not. The rifles with which each was provided was a reality. So was the small Cuban flag which Juan now wore proudly pinned to his tattered jacket.

Havana was now many miles behind. They were well up in the hills. Around them all was verdure and bloom.

This bit of wild forest beauty had escaped the devastating hand of the Spaniard.

It was Easter morning, Hal remembered, with a thrill. Surely, in this spot, nature was doing floral honor to the day.

Not a sound was heard save the calling of the birds, the buzzing of insects. Perched on a rise of ground, screened by thick bushes, a foe might have stood within a hundred feet and not discovered them.

"The only danger," smiled Hal, "would come from Juan's snoring."

Amid all this solitude of nature, however, Juan's nasal notes did not seem a source of danger.

"Jupiter! What's that?" muttered Hal, suddenly.

From his perch he had an excellent view up a long, winding ravine.

"The glint of the sun on steel, as sure as I'm a sinner," muttered the boy.

Turning, he gave Juan's nearer shoulder a quick shake.

"Ready, senor," murmured the Cuban, waking at once. "My hour is up, then?"

"No, but something else is up," whispered excited Hal, pointing up the ravine. "Look there!"

Juan looked, and became instantly awake.

"The enemy!" he muttered, his eyes flashing ominously. "Heaven be thanked that at last we have guns. We can fight!"

"Fight that force?" demanded Hal, aghast. "My friend, have you counted their number?"

"No."

"I have."

"Well?"

"They number at least sixty."

"No matter!" grated Juan. "We can worry them. We shall be killed, of course, but perhaps we can settle three or four of their men first."

"See here," remonstrated Hal. "I'm ready for fighting, but not for suicide."

"It is the way we Cubans fight," rejoined Juan, proudly. "We care not what the number of the enemy. We always fire when we see one."

"We'll fire, then, if you say so," agreed Hal. "If you asked my opinion, though, I should say that we had better wait until we have had a chance to offer ourselves at the nearest Cuban camp."

Juan fixed his wide open eyes on our hero for an instant.

"I have no doubt you are right, mi amigo," he said, an instant later. "Our Cuban blood is too hot. We lack the cool judgment of you Americanos. Senor, will you take command?"

"Until we reach camp, if you wish it."

"I beg you to do so."

"Very well; though I warn you," smiled Hal, "that I shall not give the order to attack thirty times our number."

Juan sighed, but remained silent.

"They are going to march by within a hundred feet of us," whispered Hal, following the course of the ravine.

Juan grasped his rifle tightly to still the trembling of his fingers.

By this time, the head of the column was within five hundred feet.

At the head rode a half a dozen mounted Spanish officers.

Behind them marched a captain and two lieutenants in command of the infantrymen.

Tattered and dusty-looking were these soldiers. Many of them limped, as if used up by a long forced march. Just at the foot of the hill from which Hal and Juan

glared from covert, the captain, at a sign from one of the mounted officers, cried:

"Halt!"

It was a popular order, as the relieved faces of the men instantly showed.

"Break ranks."

Arms were stacked, four sentinels mounted, and the horses tethered.

Just at that moment, two dust-covered troopers rode up the ravine from the direction of Havana.

They dismounted before the captain, talking with him in quick murmurs.

"My colonel," called the captain, saluting one of the mounted officers, "the scouts tell me that there are none of the enemy within forty miles."

"I do not believe there are any rebels nearer, captain," laughed the colonel. "So let your poor fellows get some of the rest they need so badly. True, we have no breakfast to offer them, but I have caught sight of a stream through the trees. Let those who would like to take a swim."

No proposition could have met with greater favor. As with one accord, the soldiers began to move off between the trees, while the scouts cantered away.

"You four," cried the captain, selecting a quartette of his men, "will hurry up with your swim, and return here to relieve the sentinels, that they, too, may have a plunge."

With the men went their officers, nine in number. The heat of the day made cold water a luxury that could not be resisted.

Down in the camp, with the horses and stacked arms, remained only the four sentinels.

Even these looked wistfully through the trees as the shouts and plashing of water came to their ears.

"Jupiter!" whispered Hal, his eyes beginning to sparkle. "I'm beginning to feel some of the Cuban hot blood myself."

"If we could only capture that camp!" murmured Juan, eagerly.

To his intense delight, Hal made this whispered reply:

"By thunder, we'll try it, if we go under for it!"

"Oh, my brave friend," quivered Juan Ramirez, "you have spoken as our brave Gomez would speak!"

For a few moments the heads of the two youths bobbed together in earnest, whispered conversation.

When they had finished, Juan crept off through the bushes with the stealth of an Indian.

He reached a spot twenty feet away from our hero before he halted and signaled back.

Through the bushes the muzzle of Hal's rifle protruded.

As he aimed at one of the sentinels, a curious thrill swept over the American.

He was about to take a life, and unfairly, it seemed, since he must fire from ambush upon an unsuspecting foe.

Yet, even as he hesitated, the remembrance came back to him of the evening before, when a Spanish officer had proposed to send him over the fatal ferry to Morro Castle.

The enemy would not hesitate; he must not. Besides, war consists of killing; war is gauged only by its successes.

With these thoughts surging through his mind, Hal Maynard steadied both hands and vision.

Crack!

His rifle spoke, and the sentinel at whom he had aimed dropped and lay still.

Crack!

Juan had waited only for this signal. Before the first sentinel had stuck the ground, the second had received his death-wound.

Crack! crack!

Right on the heels of the first two shots came the next pair.

Before the last two sentries had time to turn, run or fire, they had met their fates.

In a twinkling Hal was on his feet. The fire of battle was in his blood; the spirit of freedom possessed his soul as his voice rang out full and clear!

"By platoon, battalion charge!"

An answering yell came from Ramirez as that youth too leaped to his feet.

Together they rushed down the hillside, shouting commands to an imaginary battalion.

Crack! crack! crack! crack! crack!

Without stopping to aim, they fired their repeating rifles through the trees as fast as they could.

"Viva Cuba Libre!" they shouted in unison.

Through the woods came the startled yells of the bathing Spanish soldiers, just out of range of vision.

Reaching the ravine, Hal made for one stack of rifles, Juan for another.

Seizing each a rifle in either hand, they commenced discharging them two at a time in the direction of the creek.

"Al machete! al machete!" (To the sword!) roared Juan, keeping up a thunderous rattle of musketry.

"Surround the enemy!" thundered Hal. "Give no quarter to Spaniards! Every foe killed to-day is a foe the less to meet to-morrow."

All the while the incessant banging of guns rang out.

To the startled bathers by the creek it seemed as if they had fallen, naked and unarmed, into fierce, one-sided battle.

"Keep a-banging and a-shouting," muttered Hal, as he sped by Juan.

Ramirez obeyed with a will, while Hal, though he still continued to yell, busied his hands by gathering up the rifles an armful at a time.

There was rope around in plenty among the camp baggage.

Working like a Trojan, Hal quickly

had thirty of the rifles lashed upon two of the horses.

Juan turned and saw with blazing eyes what his comrade had accomplished.

"The Spaniards are running," he quivered. "If it were not so, we would have them on our hands by this time."

And he worked like a beaver to help Hal lash the remaining arms upon other horses.

There were many cartridge belts strewn around. These, too, were lashed across the saddles, as well as a few cases of ammunition.

"Here are four less of the enemy for our men to deal with," cried Juan, spurning with his foot the body of one of the four slain sentinels.

"It was a tremendous piece of cheek," blurted Hal, vaulting into one of the saddles, and seizing the halters of two led pack horses.

"The Spaniards must still be running," chuckled Juan.

"I imagine few of them stopped for their clothes," laughed Hal. "But mount, my friend, mount! When the enemy halt——"

"It will be a half an hour before they do," derided Ramirez. "Oh, mi amigo, you were born a master of strategy. It was magnificent—that charge of a battalion of trees—that fusilade fired by four hands!"

"Into saddle! forward!" urged Hal. "It is our turn to laugh, now, but in sixty seconds it may not be. When the enemy discover the trick, rivers of blood would not satisfy them!"

Smiling grimly, with a full realization of the peril, Hal Maynard urged his mount into a trot.

CHAPTER IX.

BATTLE IN EARNEST.

"Viva Cuba Libre!"

Ramirez shouted that stirring battle-cry with the full strength of his lungs.

"Oh, it's just glorious!" declared Hal, turning his sparkling eyes upon his comrade. "Two recruits, with six horses and sixty rifles!"

"Our comrades—that is, our comrades-to-be—will embrace us!" uttered Juan.

Click-clack! Hoofs rang out sharply on the stony bed of the ravine.

"Even if they turn to follow, we are leaving the Spaniards behind," cried Juan.

"Very likely; but what if we were to encounter a second body of the enemy here in this ravine? Our turn to laugh would be over?"

That thought urged them to greater speed. When the ravine narrowed, Hal, with two of the led horses in tow, took the lead, Ramirez following closely.

"Juan, my comrade!"

"Si, mi amigo!"

"We are coming out of the ravine. There is a plain ahead."

Three minutes more of hard trotting brought them out into open country, dotted here and there with small groves of palms.

"Better halt," advised Hal, reining up.

Ramirez did the same, without questioning.

"Rope the horses abreast," directed Maynard. "You can ride on one side of the line, I on the other. In that way we can keep the brutes at a gallop, if needed."

Dismounting, they quickly accomplished this task. Within two minutes they were once more in saddle.

"You must be our guide," suggested Maynard, as he settled down in saddle.

"Where shall we find the nearest Cuban camp?"

"I do not know," replied the Cuban. "I know where Major Alvaredo was the day before yesterday, but—diablo!—the Cubans are not likely to camp for two hours in the same spot. All I can say, mi amigo, is that we had better ride eastward, trusting that we shall meet some pacifico who can tell us the way more particularly."

"Forward, then!"

From a trot they broke into a gallop, urging the pack horses on by liberal lashing with ropes.

In two minutes more our friends had covered over half a mile.

"I heard yells," muttered Hal, looking backward over his shoulder.

Ramirez looked, too, then broke into a hearty laugh.

Back on a hill, near the mouth of the ravine, they saw a sight calculated to inspire mirth.

Spanish soldiers, some of them nude and many half-dressed, dotted the hill.

In the first fright of surprise, these men had fled. Then, finding that none of their number were killed, and that no foe pursued, they had halted, turned about.

They had probably found their four dead comrades, and must have divined, from the absence of such footmarks as a battalion would have made, that they had been tricked.

So they had pursued until now they had reached a spot whence they were able to see the exact strength of the attacking force.

Frantic shouts now rent the air, reaching our young friends even at that distance.

In the lead of all the Spaniards, Hal could make out the uniform of the Spanish colonel.

"He seems mad," observed Hal, quizzically. "If those soldiers were close at hand, unarmed though they are, they would make things hot for us."

Ramirez nodded, his face darkening.

"Mi amigo," he suggested, tremulously, "suppose we stop and give them fight."

"With these horses and all these guns destined for the insurgents?" demanded Hal. "My friend—nit! We have no

right to risk losing such splendid supplies."

"At least," begged Ramirez, "let us halt and fire a half a dozen shots into them."

"Fire at unarmed men?" retorted Hal. "Not while I'm here to stop it."

"Mi amigo, you are right," replied Juan, with an air of self-reproach. "But do not lame me. We have so much reason to hate that uniform of Spain that we cannot resist the temptation to fire upon it wherever we see it."

"I don't blame you," nodded Hal. "But my grievances against Spain are of such recent date that I can wait for fair fight."

No attempt was made by the Spaniards to pursue the pair across the plain. Such a chase would have been futile, anyway, for jaded men are no match for galloping horses.

In another half hour the foe were left five miles to the rear.

Our young friends, too, had come to the end of the plain. Before them stretched a gradual slope leading up into the hills.

"I think we can halt to breathe our horses," proposed Hal. "What do you say?"

Ramirez, nodding, both threw themselves out of saddle to stretch their legs.

"It's odd that we haven't met a single passer-by," commented Hal.

"What else would you expect?" demanded the Cuban, shrugging his shoulders. "Spain has burned down all the country homes, and driven the people into the cities. Even if pacificos had the courage to remain out here in the country, on what could they subsist? There is not enough food out here to feed a rat."

"They would have almost as much to eat here as in the cities," remarked Maynard, growing misty-eyed over the remembrance of the thousands of starving Cuban reconcentrados he had seen in Havana. "But we must go on, Juan. The more I think, the hotter my blood becomes. I shall not be happy until I stand under the Cuban flag."

Ramirez stretched out his hand, grasping our hero's warmly.

"I can never forget, mi amigo," he

murmured, huskily, "that it was you who gave me the happiness of being able to take to the long grass."

Mounting again, Hal gave the signal to go forward. Up the slope they moved at a jogging gait, being compelled once more to lead their pack horses.

Hal reached the highest land just in advance of his comrade.

Like a flash Maynard wheeled about.

"Halt! Dismount! Don't come to the top," he cried. "Tether your horses—so. Follow me."

Rifle in hand, Hal led the way, Ramirez following without a word.

"Look down there," cried Hal.

In a valley to the northward rested a squad of Spanish cavalry men, some twenty in number, and commanded by an officer.

Ramirez looked, his eyes flashing with hate.

The enemy were dismounted, with horses tethered.

"We can fire now!" breathed the Cuban. "Those men are armed."

"Wait!" warned Hal. "Come here. Now look down there."

Down the southward slope of the hill, less than half the distance away of the dismounted cavalry was a sight that made the Cuban's blood boil still hotter.

Four pacificos, their hands bound and roped together, were slowly ascending the grade.

Ahead of them rode three Spanish cavalymen; behind the prisoners a like number of guards.

"What do you say now?" quivered Hal.

"The pacificos must be saved. They are to be taken to Havana or shot. The latter would be the most merciful fate."

Ramirez spoke jerkily, at the same time swinging his rifle into position.

"Not yet," commanded Hal. "Those fellows are coming this way. We can fire straighter when they are nearer. If they keep to their course, they will go by within fifty feet of here."

"You command," grumbled Ramirez, "but it is hard to wait."

"It's common sense," declared the American. "If we were to fire now, and miss, the cavalry in the valley on the other side of the hill could reach here be-

fore the fight was over. We should be killed, and all to no purpose."

"You have a plan?" questioned Ramirez.

"Thunder, yes!"

"If it works as well as the other did my patience will be rewarded."

"Slip back to the horses. Get four more rifles—loaded ones."

Ramirez vanished, though it hardly seemed as if he had gone, before he was back again.

"Here they are, senor, and loaded."

"Good. Now crouch down, after placing two of the rifles at my side and two by your own side. Whatever you do, don't fire until I give the word."

Ramirez obeyed, though the suspense made him tremble.

His eyes flashed like jewels as he saw the four Cubans and their guard come nearer.

"Surely they are near enough now to open fire," he whispered hoarsely.

But Hal shook his head emphatically.

"No, no, my comrade! When we fire, we must take no chance of missing. Now, not another word, but you will hear me whisper 'fire' when they are within a hundred feet. You take the fellow in the front rank on the extreme left."

Juan protruded the muzzle of one of his weapons through the bushes that screened them from sight.

He shook so with impatience as to make the bushes rattle.

"Steady," whispered Hal.

Ramirez, by a tremendous effort at patience, got a better grip on himself.

Nearer, still nearer, came the six troopers and their captives.

Hal himself found it hard to restrain the temptation to fire, though he held himself in check to the last.

But at last the whispered word came:

"Fire!"

Two jets of flame shot out from the bushes; two troopers reeled from saddle and fell.

Crack! crack! Two more were down.

Crack! crack! A fifth trooper fell, all within the space of five seconds.

Ramirez, firing with the deadly aim of hatred, had brought down all three of his men, but Hal missed at the third shot.

"Car-r-r-r-rajo!" vented the solitary

remaining trooper, wheeling and putting spurs to his horse.

Crack! Ramirez fired again, bringing this fellow down, too.

Hal darted to his feet and started down the slope, Ramirez posting after him.

At the first sound of fire, the four pacificos had thrown themselves to the earth. Now they raised themselves, peering eagerly at their rescuers.

"You are friends of Cuba?" panted Hal.

A hot chorus in the affirmative answered him.

"You will fight with us? There are more foes near."

"Si, si, si," (yes, yes, yes) cried one of the pacificos, while the other three raised a tumultuous shout of:

"Viva Cuba libre!"

Hal and Juan instantly busied themselves with freeing the quartette.

"Follow us to the top of the hill at your best speed," yelled Maynard.

He reached there ahead of the rescued ones, faced them, and shoved into the hands of each a rifle.

As these were repeating weapons, each still contained several shots.

Below, on the other side of the hill, an animated scene was going on.

The squad, a few moments before lolling on the grass, had now sprung into saddle.

Their officer was bawling himself hoarse with his rapidly delivered orders.

For a few seconds the squad seemed uncertain whether to flee or fight.

Hal kept his little force out of sight by making them crouch behind the bushes.

"I have waited a year and more for such a chance as this," sobbed one of the pacificos, kissing the barrel of his rifle, and Hal, looking the emaciated wretches over, had no doubt that they would fight to the last breath.

Juan slipped back to where the horses were tethered, returning with more cartridges.

Hal, in the meantime, had restrained the others from firing.

"It would do little good at this range," he explained, "and from what I have heard the Cubans are not so rich in ammunition that they can afford to waste any."

All the time he kept his eyes on the squad below.

Their officer had decided upon an attack, for at a quick command from him the troopers spread out in skirmish line and advanced.

Instantly the pacificos began to take eager aim.

"Don't fire yet," ordered Hal.

"But senor," pleaded one of the quartette, "it is so hard to see the Spaniards, and yet not fire!"

"The best fighters," rejoined Hal, promptly, "are those who can keep cool and obey orders."

"The senor is right, mi amigos," ejaculated Ramirez. "Twice he has restrained my impatience, and in consequence we won both times."

Bang! A line of fire ran along the skirmish line below, the reports sounding as one.

Whish! whish! A tornado of whistling bullets tore through the leaves of the bushes that sheltered the little Cuban force.

"Oh, mi amigo!" suddenly groaned Ramirez, turning white.

For one of the bullets had struck Hal Maynard.

Up flew his hand to his forehead.

In the next second he keeled back—stretched out.

CHAPTER X.

UNDER CUBA'S FLAG.

"Ten lives shall not pay for that one!" exclaimed Juan.

But hardly were his words out when Hal sat up, wiping away the blood from his forehead.

"I'm a long ways from dead yet," he gritted, wiping away the blood.

Ramirez ran to his side.

His nervous fingers glided swiftly over the American's forehead, making quick examination of the wound.

"Santa Maria be praised!" cheered the Cuban. "The wound is not a deep one."

"Glancing bullet, likely," muttered Hal, rising to his knees, and picking up his rifle once more. "The shock knocked me over, I suppose. Perhaps fright had something to do with it."

"Fright?" echoed Juan, indignantly. "Nothing of the sort."

"Well, I'm certainly feeling some fright," smiled Hal, his face more than a trifle pallid as he took another look down below at the squad trotting upward.

They were just aiming for another volley, those Spaniards, who were now hardly more than an eighth of a mile away.

"Down!" warned Maynard, himself setting the example.

He had no more than ducked when the volley came.

"Up!" quivered Hal. "Give 'em some of their own medicine!"

Six shots rang out, almost simultaneously. Two saddles were emptied.

"Keep a-pumping," ordered Hal, breathlessly, as he discharged his own piece as fast as he could work the mechanism.

His own wound had been caused undoubtedly by a glancing bullet, but this is the most painful kind of injury. It maddened him, made him utterly reckless.

Five more saddles were quickly emptied. By this time the firing was general.

Clack! clack! clack! rang the hoofs. The cavalry, firing at will like their opponents, were now within a few yards of the top of the hill.

The Cubans were overmatched. Hal felt that the last few moments of his life had come.

Yet only one thought actuated him. Before he closed his eyes he would send as many Spaniards as possible to their last account.

Crack! crack! crack! Half of the Spaniards were out of the fight by the time the two forces came face to face at little more than arm's length.

Bang! A ball from Juan Ramirez's rifle passed clean through the head of the lieutenant in command, killing him instantly.

"No quarter!" yelled Juan as the six leaped to their feet for hand-to-hand combat.

"On the contrary!" thundered Hal. "Any enemy who throws down his gun must not be harmed!"

A ball from a cavalryman's revolver sent one of the pacificos staggering back—dead.

Hal immediately avenged by killing the trooper.

Now one of the enemy threw down his sabre and revolver, crying for quarter.

"Spare his life, then," shouted Hal, running forward.

That command acted like magic. Not another shot was fired, for not one of the eight surviving Spaniards lost a second in surrendering.

This they followed up by dismounting and submitting to being tied.

Ramirez, with blood running from a wound in his left shoulder, superintended the work of tying.

There were eight of the prisoners. As soon as bound, they were ordered to remount, and were next lashed to their saddles.

"The dogs!" vented Juan, gnashing his teeth as he looked the troopers over. "Of course they surrender, for the Cubans treat their prisoners of war kindly, and it is easier to surrender than to be shot. Besides, these fellows know that the Cubans cannot be bothered long with prisoners and that they will be set free."

"This is horse fair day for us," laughed Hal. "Besides the horses which the Spaniards ride, there are four more below which appear to be uninjured."

This was the fact. Hal's little command now had eighteen horses in all.

As soon as these had been corralled, the field was gone over for every weapon and cartridge that could be found.

Fifteen minutes were thus consumed.

At last Hal had time to think of the pacifico who had been killed.

He was dead beyond a doubt.

"My brother," huskily murmured another of the pacificos.

"He died nobly, in a good cause," said Hal, soothingly.

"He died for Cuba!" cried the dead man's brother, throwing back his head proudly. "I shall pray to the Almighty that I may die in the same splendid way."

Hal was ready to proceed, now, yet before the start could be made there was one sad duty to perform—the saddest that belongs to war.

A shallow trench was dug, and in this the man who had been slain was laid.

Then, while the rest stood by with un-

covered heads, murmuring silent prayers, two of the pacificos covered the still form over.

There was no time to bury the Spanish slain.

Indeed, the Cubans, embittered by more than three years of suffering under the infamous war methods of Spain, were in little mood to do anything decent by the remains of the slain foe.

"The buzzards shall get them," cried Juan, disdainfully. "The buzzards alone, in Cuba, do not go hungry!"

As Hal's little command and considerable train moved forward, our hero heard the story of the pacificos.

Some fourteen months before they had broken away from Havana. Since then they had lived in hiding in the woods, subsisting mainly on roots and fruit.

Once in a while they had received morsels of meat from passing bodies of Cuban soldiers.

But the law of the Republic of Cuba forbade them to join the army without weapons and ammunition, which was the only reason they had remained pacificos.

That very morning they had been surprised and surrounded while sleeping.

Incapable of resistance for lack of arms, they had been forced to surrender.

They were on their way to Havana when rescued. Had their journey been finished they would undoubtedly have been shot in the prison yard of either Morro Castle or the Cabanas Fortress.

From these men Hal learned that the Cuban commander, Major Alvaredo, was supposed to be somewhere in the neighborhood, though that officer's exact location could be only a matter of conjecture, for the Cubans moved from point to point with the speed of human lightning.

"I shall volunteer to the first Cuban commander I meet—no matter who he is," declared Hal.

"Volunteer?" echoed Juan, smiling. "It is too late for that, mi amigo! Judging by the trail we have left behind, you are already a full-fledged Cuban commander. Never has so small a command done handsomer work."

At noon they halted, in the midst of one of nature's blooming wildernesses. Here there had been no plantations, no

homes, hence the blighting hand of Spanish devastation had not left its mark.

For the first time our hero remembered the food with which Captain Blodgett had provided Juan and himself the night before.

It was brought to light now, and given entirely to the three late pacificos. They devoured it like famished creatures.

"It seems as if I lived again," declared one of the poor, thin fellows, when he had finished.

"It is like a touch of Heaven," said the second.

"The first real food I have touched in weeks," sighed the third. "With this in my stomach I can fight for a week without feeding."

It was still dangerous to delay. Hal gave the word to start.

It took an hour to cover the next five miles, for the road was now all the way up grade.

It was near the top of a hill that Hal was startled by a sudden sharp command of:

"Halt!"

In the same instant our hero found himself looking into the muzzles of a dozen rifles.

Yet the men behind those rifles were invisible behind a dense tangle of green foliage.

"What do you want here?" came the quick question.

It was Juan Ramirez who answered:

"We seek Major Alvaredo."

"And if he is not here?"

"Then any Cuban officer will do, for I know you to be Cubans. Send word to your commander, please, that five recruits wait to offer themselves."

"Major Alvaredo is here," replied a grave voice.

Through a screen of leaves came a short, wiry-looking man of middle age, a bronzed, scarred veteran who, despite his ragged attire, looked every inch the trooper.

One hand rested on the naked machete that he wore dangling at his side; the other hand touched lightly against a revolver.

"You are recruits?" he asked, keenly surveying the five, then gazing with intense pleasure upon the horses, weapons

and prisoners they brought him. "Judging from appearances, you will be valuable recruits. Where do you come from?"

Major Alvaredo listened with an interest that soon changed to amazement as he heard of the doings of the morning.

By the time that the narration was over, he grasped our hero cordially by the hand.

"You are ten times welcome, senor," he cried. "You want to see service against Spain? Carramba! you shall see it. And if I mistake not, senor Americano, my general, Calixta Garcia, will receive you as something more than a private soldier. You have won a commission, if ever man did in our armies."

"If there is a commission going a-begging," smiled Hal, "it belongs to my guide and mentor, Juan Ramirez."

"Oh, as to that," smiled the major, "there may be commissions enough for two."

With that they were conducted into the camp, where the major had about him eighty of the most daring riders in Cuba.

Thus our hero had gained the Cuban

ranks. He was destined to become one of the most famous fighters of them all.

That night Hal Maynard slept under the flag of Free Cuba.

But he dreamed of the coming of the Stars and Stripes!

[THE END.]

Cuba is the scene of splendid deeds! The struggle of her people for the Heaven-born boon of independence has commanded the whole world's admiration, just as the Starry Flag Weekly's series of Cuban war stories will win the hearty applause of all American readers. Hal Maynard and Juan Ramirez played manly, dashing parts in that hot-blooded struggle. What was perhaps their greatest exploit of all will be thrillingly told by Douglas Wells in "Gomez's Yankee Scout; or, The Blow that Told for Cuba," which will be published complete in next week's Starry Flag Weekly, No. 2. This series will embrace by far the best Cuban war stories that will be published!

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT.

It is the unchanging object of the publishers of the STARRY FLAG WEEKLY to have the best stories of adventure that can be procured, regardless of expense or trouble. Following this policy, the publishers decided some weeks ago to send Mr. Douglas Wells to Cuba. Mr. Wells, being an old campaigner, is accustomed to moving on short notice. Within two hours of the receipt of his orders he was speeding southward "under light equipment."

Mr. Wells has spent many years of his eventful life in the armed camps of the world. He has spent many more years of his life in describing what he has seen, in works ranging all the way from history to romance. His long and varied experience, powers of observation, and knowledge of human nature have all greatly aided him in knowing just what subjects to depict, therefore, on reaching Havana he lost no time in getting to work. In the face of many difficulties he succeeded in obtaining permission to proceed into the interior, and he was soon among the insurgents. Then followed days of hard, rough riding, scant sleep and poor and little food. He was received by General Gomez, of the Cuban Army, and, after witnessing much of the Cuban drilling and some of the fighting made his way from the island to Key West.

Should war take place between the United States and Spain all his stories will be written from the front. Readers of the STARRY FLAG WEEKLY will have the most accurate and truthful pictures of the war, and those who are familiar with this author's thrilling style will understand that, while there may be other Cuban stories published, none will be equal to those which will appear in the STARRY FLAG WEEKLY.

Hal Maynard will be the hero, a bright, typical dashing American boy. As Napoleon once said, that every soldier of France carried in his knapsack a marshal's baton, so every American boy has implanted in him the seeds of heroism, awaiting only the sunshine of opportunity for development.

Thus Hal Maynard will be the representative of all American boys, and our readers, in following his adventures, will see done exactly what they would do themselves were they in the hero's place.

Young Americans will do well to keep their eyes on the STARRY FLAG WEEKLY. It will be in these columns they will find the best and most graphic stories of the war—stories that will be written by an author who enjoys the somewhat rare distinction of knowing what he is writing about. Mr. Wells will not quit the front so long as the fighting goes on. Who can describe so well as he the march of great events this summer?